

Victorian Studies Association of Ontario



September 2013

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The President's Message

I'm honoured to be the incoming president of the VSAO. For those of you who don't yet know me, I am an art historian at the University of Toronto focusing on mid- to late-nineteenth-century art in Britain and America, and I hope over the course of my term on the executive to induce more scholars in the history of art, visual culture, and fashion to join the VSAO's ranks.

I'm happy to announce that our evening lecture series for this year includes a field trip to Spadina House on 7 November 2013, where we'll enjoy a tour as well as a lecture by a new Victorianist in the Department of English at the University of Toronto, Danny Wright, who works on logic and desire in the Victorian novel. On 30 January 2014, Grace Kehler, of McMaster University's Department of English and Cultural Studies, will speak about Darwin, Wagner, and the concept of time.

Planning for the spring conference has begun, and our two keynote speakers will be Stephen Arata and Barbara Leckie. Professor Arata, of the University of Virginia's Department of English, is the author of *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*. Professor Leckie, former VSAO president, teaches in the Department of English Language and Literature at Carleton University and will be speaking about something most of us are probably quite familiar with: Victorian procrastination.

A word about our new website, which is currently under construction: recent pages and posts are available on the new site. We are in the process of migrating older content, but much of it will only be available at the old site for the next few months (<http://www.yorku.ca/vsao/>). We're grateful for your patience during this transition. In the meantime, please bookmark this new site (<http://vsao.apps01.yorku.ca/>). Among other things, [you'll find the membership renewal page here](#).

I wish everyone a good start to the new term, and I look forward to seeing you at this year's events!

Alison Syme

Evening Lectures

1. Daniel Wright (University of Toronto)
Thursday, 7 November 2013
[Spadina House Museum](#) (285 Spadina Road)
2. Grace Kehler (McMaster University)
Thursday, 30 January 2014
University of Toronto (161 University College)

Call for Papers

For the annual VSAO-ACCUTE Panel to be held at the 2014 Congress

Joint Session: Victorian Studies Association of Ontario (VSAO) at ACCUTE
May 24-27 2014
Brock University, St Catharines, Ontario.
Deadline for submissions: 1 November 2013

"Stuff and Stuffing"

Henry James' infamous condemnation of nineteenth-century novels as "loose baggy monsters" is so perfectly devastating that many forget that the author was posing a question. Flummoxed by a literary form that so readily included "the accidental and the arbitrary" in its representations, James pondered: what do they "artistically mean?" Walter Benjamin, another modern looking back on the nineteenth century with a sense of bewilderment, suggested elliptically that the swollen cushions, ample hangings, and profusion of dust covers, doilies, and antimacassars of the nineteenth-century interior were evidence of a deeply engrained "posture ... of struggle and defense."

This panel seeks to address James and Benjamin's queries, and, more generally, to explore the profusion of "stuff" in the Victorian era. A notoriously vague term, "stuff" can refer to a workable material that can be molded into other forms—think of the abundance of new commodities and technologies wrought by the industrial revolution, or the discovery of new

entities, speciations, and categories of materiality by the burgeoning fields of science. However, “stuff” can also refer to material that remains stubbornly unspecialized, undifferentiated, and inert—dust, batting, and fillings that are useful chiefly in their ability to insulate and take up space. How did the Victorians interact with, represent, and imitate their materially profuse surroundings? What stuffs Victorian texts?

Papers may consider such topics as:

- * Taxidermy and other stuffed animals
- * Crinoline, padding, puffed sleeves, and the stuff of cloth
- * Foodstuffs and stuffing oneself: gluttony, corpulence, and satiation
- * Baggy monsters: rhetorical verbiage, textual excess, narrative bulk, and the serial novel
- * Dickensian stuff: the Cratchitt Christmas goose stuffing, Sir Duddle’s stuffed people; the Veneerings and the Buffers
- * Modernist creations of and reactions to Victorian “stuffiness”
- * Filling in and filling up
- * Household stuff and stuffy houses: billowing curtains, draped fabrics, covers and casings
- * Stuff and nonsense

Questions and submissions should be sent to VSAOatACCUTE@gmail.com. Please submit the following as separate documents by 1 November 2013:

1. a proposal of 300-500 words that has NO identifying marks for the author
2. an abstract of 100 words and a bio of 50 words
3. a [Proposal Info Sheet, available here](#)

Report on the 2013 VSAO-Accute Panel

The theme of the VSAO panel at the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English conference at the Congress of the Humanities, held in Victoria, June 1-4 2013, was “We Are Not Amused: Victorian Comedy and Humour.” Our first speaker was Rachel McArthur (University of Toronto), who drew on George Meredith’s 1877 *Essay on Comedy* to argue that the Victorian period was a turning point in the theorizing of comedy in English, noting the influence of Meredith’s politically progressive conception of comedy in the Modernist period. Our second speaker, Emily Morris (St. Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan), focused on representations of clothing in Elizabeth’s Gaskell’s *Cranford* in order to suggest that the target of the humour in this text is not the characters it features but rather a distant, London-based “you” who is separate from the reader. Morris argued that *Cranford*’s citizens, despite being the objects of laughter, are empowered by the humour of the text. The overlapping concerns of the two papers generated questions about laughter, power and genre that continued after the panel formally ended. Our thanks go out to these speakers for their intriguing papers, and to the panel attendees for their engaging and wide-ranging questions.

Letitia Henville
Department of English
University of Toronto

New Titles by VSAO Members

We are pleased to announce the following recently published volumes, authored by our members. Congratulations to all!

Esmail, Jennifer. [*Reading Victorian Deafness: Signs and Sounds in Victorian Literature and Culture*](#). Ohio University Press, 2013.

Phillips, Paul T. [*Contesting the Moral High Ground: Popular Moralists in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*](#). Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2013.

[*Sanitary Reform in Victorian Britain: End of Century Assessments and New Directions*](#). Ed. Barbara Leckie. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012. Vol. 6 of 6 vols. Gen. Ed. Michelle Allen-Emerson. 2013.

Thompson, Neville. [*Canada and the End of the Imperial Dream: Beverley Baxter's Reports from London through War and Peace, 1936-1960*](#). Toronto: Oxford University Press Canada, 2013.

CFP: William Morris Society of Canada 2014 Symposium: Morris & History

University of Toronto
Saturday 22 March, 2014

The William Morris Society of Canada invites proposals for 20-minute papers to be presented at a 2014 symposium on Morris and History. Considerations of Morris's interest in history and of historical influences and connections implicit within one or more aspects of his work are welcome. Papers may explore these themes in relation to his many artistic and literary endeavours, to development of his political thinking and also to changes in his ideas about history itself.

Please send electronic copies of proposals (300-500 words) and a brief biographical statement to Richard Bishop, Program Committee Chair (rjbishop@rogers.com) by 15 December 2013.